

# THE INTEGRATED TEACHER: SELECTING THE BEST APPROACH FOR A VARIETY OF CLASSROOM SITUATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*It is important as we look at the educational environment to understand that it is a complex system that calls for analyses at multiple levels. One who enters from a single theoretical orientation is at a distinct disadvantage. Particularly when unique students arrive with various emotional and behavioral difficulties, being restricted to a narrow behavioral position, a humanistic position, a cognitive/systems position or whatever position chosen, severely limits the possibility of positive outcomes. The multiple levels of the situation include the behaviors displayed, the personality/characteristics of the children, the environment in which events are occurring, overall systemic functioning, and the personality/characteristics of the teacher. As teachers of these multiple levels, who would be best able to effect a positive outcome in this classroom/ environment? Over which of these multiple levels do the teachers have the most control? Hopefully, we would expect the teachers and administrators to be better skilled than the students in effecting change. This article explores the need for a variety of theoretical applications to effectively meet the demands of the diverse students and situations in public schools. Specifically, the utility of humanistic applications, behavioral applications, and social learning/cognitive applications in the classroom are examined.*

*Keywords: Behavioral, humanistic, social, cognitive, classroom management, learning.*

## INTRODUCTION

Many educators believe that successful classroom management sets the scaffold for learning and that a teacher's classroom supervision practices are socializing influences on students (Elias & Schwab, 2006). Certainly, teacher preparation programs typically devote an entire course to classroom management theories and programs. Novice teachers frequently believe that if they follow the principles of their chosen management program they will have the rapt attention and cooperation of their students. When school begins and the teacher realizes that there are a few children who are not responding to the structure set forth, scrambling to find an alternative classroom management program ensues.

This article underlines that one single prepackaged classroom management program will most likely not address specific children's behavior, particularly those with disabilities who are participating in an inclusion classroom. Initially, the article discusses principles of three major theories: (1) behavioral, (2) social learning/cognitive, and (3) humanistic. Next, a vignette is

presented and each theory in regard to the vignette's details have been discussed. The article concludes giving implications for novice as well as seasoned teachers.

## Behavioral Principles

More than likely, the reader will have some exposure to behavioral principles. The following will be a brief refresher: Recall that classical conditioning involves an automatic reaction to a stimulus that has been paired with a stimulus that does not typically elicit such a response (Pryor, 2002). For example, when a teacher tells a student to go to the office, there is usually some automatic fear that results. If each time the teacher writes a referral before telling the student to go to the office, the student will experience fear when the teacher is seen writing the referral.

Operant conditioning organizes the environment to provide consequences for desired behaviors and undesired behaviors. When teachers want behaviors to continue, they use reinforcement; when they want behaviors to diminish or cease, they use punishment. A positive reinforcer makes the recipient happy and reinforces the desired behavior; recipients of negative

reinforcement engage in the desired behavior to make aversive stimuli stop (Pryor, 2002). For instance, regarding reinforcers, if a student is on-task and the teacher praises this behavior, the student will remain on task; if the teacher stands at the student's desk as long as the student is not on-task, the student will engage in on-task behavior so the teacher will move to another location. We, of course, can assume that the teacher standing over the student's desk is an aversive event. Regarding punishers, if a student does not submit homework, the student will be given a positive punishment of detention; if the student receives a negative punisher and must stay after school every afternoon to complete the previous homework until the homework is submitted on-time, the student who does not want to stay after school will have homework completed to submit on-time (Pryor, 2002).

Many learned people insist that ignoring a behavior does not work. In fact, ignoring a behavior to extinguish it works well if the behavior is performed to receive attention. If attention is not the goal of the behavior, then extinction is likely not the tool to use (Pryor, 2002). For example, if the teacher responds to a student each time the pupil speaks out, the student is being reinforced for the behavior. Even though the teacher scolds the student for not raising hand and waiting to be addressed, when the teacher responds to the student when no hand is raised, there is immediate reinforcement for the behavior. To extinguish the behavior, the teacher must not respond to the student unless the hand is raised. Many times, in instances such as these, the teacher's behavior must be shaped first, because children do what works, and they learn very quickly.

Schedules of reinforcement include several dimensions: (i) Continuous reinforcement occurs every time a behavior is displayed. For example, each time one puts money into a soda machine, a soda is expected, (ii) Variable, or partial, reinforcement occurs in two forms, which are then parsed into two additional dimensions: First, *time* (interval) is used either as a fixed interval or a variable interval. A student who is monitored every five minutes and reinforced if on-task is on a fixed interval. When that student moves to a variable interval, reinforcement may

be after five minutes, two minutes, or seven minutes. The time varies randomly. Second, *number* (ratio) is also used as a fixed ratio or a variable ratio. The student who is reinforced after every third sentence written (fixed ratio) might eventually be moved to a variable ratio such as reinforcement after three sentences, after six sentences, after one sentence. The number varies, again, randomly. The variable ratio or interval produces a longer-duration behavior that is highly resistant to extinction (Pryor, 2002).

Shaping, or training, a behavior is comprised of two aspects: (i) methods used, and (ii) sequence of steps. There are a number of issues to consider when training a behavior. First, the target behavior must be clearly and operationally defined, and the steps from the student's current level to the target level must be specified in small incremental changes. To begin the process of shaping a new behavior, the teacher should continuously reinforce each advance in steps. Continuous reinforcement produces the most rapid acquisition. For each step, the requirements in increments have to be raised small enough that the student has a reasonable chance to attain the new criterion. In the process it is necessary to focus on training the student in one thing at a time. After a response has been well established the teacher may move from the continuous to a variable schedule before moving to the next level of increased requirements. When introducing the new requirements, the former ones could be temporarily relaxed. If one shaping procedure is not working, another one should be found. If the behavior deteriorates, start over by returning to previous steps. The appropriate behaviors will be quickly recovered. End each shaping session on a high note (Pryor, 2002).

To summarize, there are a number of behavioral principles that would assist teachers in managing their classrooms. The requirement would be to know the tenets well enough to use them properly and to realize when teachers might inadvertently be reinforcing poor behavior. The secret is always to look at the situation objectively and focus on specific behaviors that are creating poor conduct and address one behavior at a time.

### Social/Cognitive Learning

The power of observational learning was documented by

Banduro (1962). To teach children through observation, the child must be capable of managing internal cognitive variables. Observation also reveals the probable consequences of the new behavior, whether it is reinforced or not. Banduro (1977) outlined four components of observational learning:

1. Attention Processes: Unless attention is paid to the model, the student will not imitate the actions. If the teacher is presenting a way of remembering the planets in their individual orbits around the sun, and the student is not attending, the student will not likely be able to reproduce the correct listing.
2. Retention Processes: Since the desired behavior may be performed some time after observation, there must be some means to remember the procedural behavior. With children who have language, symbolic representation is possible. Given a mnemonic that is a silly sentence, the student is better able to recall the order of the planets. (*My very excellent mother just served us nine pizzas* was a favorite mnemonic until Pluto was demoted.)
3. Motor Production Processes: Accuracy of the reproduced behavior depends on the necessary motor skills. Whether oral or written, the student must demonstrate knowledge of the planet order and needs motor or verbal skills to do so.
4. Reinforcement and Motivational Processes: A student is likely to imitate the behavior of recalling the planet order if a reward is likely. For instance, if one child is praised by the teacher for recalling the planet order correctly, another child will be motivated to perform the same activity to obtain a similar reward.

When children observe teachers who refer to themselves in positive ways when a mistake is made such as, "I didn't do it right; I'm going to be more careful this time when I do it," the student is likely to imitate such language, even if only internally, in similar circumstances. Likewise, if a teacher fumes, stomps, and curses when a mistake is made, students may imitate those parts of the behavior for which they believe they are not likely to be punished.

In recent years, Bandura (1998) has focused on self-

efficacy, which involves self-observation and self-regulation. Bandura maintains that when children observe that they are capable of specific tasks, they are more likely to approach the tasks with confidence and enthusiasm. However, if children doubt their abilities, they are likely to work less energetically and quit when the tasks become difficult.

Sources of self-efficacy include actual performance, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological cues. If students are able to perform a task satisfactorily, their self-efficacy increases; likewise, if students continuously experience frustration and failure, their sense of efficacy diminishes. Yet, if students observe other students being successful, they tend to infer that they can do it as well. Verbal persuasion in the form of pep talks convinces students that they are capable of performing more adequately. Finally, physiological cues may be interpreted differently by different students. Social psychologists frequently point out that the sensations one student might interpret as nervousness, another student might interpret as excitement (Crain, 2000).

To summarize, observational learning and modeling have cognitive and behavioral components. Teachers can observe the behavior for clues about what is reinforcing students. Likewise, teachers model appropriate social behavior in every aspect of the classroom.

## Humanistic Learning

To begin a discussion of a humanistic approach to the educational process, we must take a holistic stance. The child cannot be fragmented into stimuli and responses, but the whole child is a decent rational being attempting to accomplish a goal in the current situation. The idea is that the children are actually capable of solving their own problems if allowed. Each child is unique; therefore, unique perspectives from which to conceptualize and manage the problem are required, and only the child has this unique perspective. The teacher's task is to help the child understand the problem and solution more clearly and work toward the solution. The teacher, rather than carefully manipulating the stimuli in the environment,



might simply ask the child 'what is happening?' or 'what should be changed?'. The teacher, rather than a director, becomes the listener, striving to understand and reflect what the child is experiencing.

As Carl Rogers (1980) said, "Individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behavior; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided" (p. 115).

From this perspective the learning process is not purely cognitive but is emotional as well. It is not enough to present content because perception of the content is regulated by students' emotional response to the content, the teacher, the environment, and other factors, including each child's personality.

Borrowing a structure from Tageson (1982), a humanistic approach must include the following:

1. A subjective orientation: The concern is with the child's understanding of the events occurring in the situation. The objective circumstance is interpreted differently by assorted observers, and the humanistic approach calls for an attempt to understand these varying interpretations.
2. A holistic approach: As already noted, isolating the elements in the situation often leads to a distortion of the total situation. As frequently noted in various areas of psychology, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.
3. A belief in individuals' ability to actualize their own potential: Understanding the child's unique perspective is required, and only the child can provide access to that perspective. The task of a teacher is to gain insight into that perspective and assist the child to develop insight as well.
4. Self-determination: Implicit in this approach is the belief that all persons have a certain amount of freedom to make decisions. This freedom also implies a sense of responsibility for actions. Teacher's task is to help the child manage freedom and accept personal responsibility.
5. Authenticity: Teachers must be authentic in their relationships with students. Students must also be given

importance as separate individuals, and they deserve an honest dialog with teachers.

6. Self-transcendence: Teachers are not just creatures of this physical earth, but they have a transcendent spirit that can soar above the mundane. Helping the child to experience this transcendence power, while managing the mundane in the present situation contributes to the nobility of teaching.

7. Person-centered: At the base of the whole approach is the dedication to the person. The person, not the subject area or content, is the focus of our teaching efforts.

Some of the techniques that grow out of this approach are active listening, a nonjudgmental approach, and interactions with the child that reveal a basic appreciation of the child's worth. Who owns the problem must be addressed and children allowed to generate creative alternate ideas for classroom resolutions.

## Vignette

Ms. Thomas is a seventh grade teacher in a rural school. Her class at any given time has diverse cultures. Ms. Thomas has one particular irregular class after lunch. They make so much noise that the principal of the school has spoken to Ms. Thomas about her control of the class. Cedric is one child in the room. He is constantly fidgeting, out of his seat, talking to peers, and generally disrupting the classroom. He becomes quiet for a short time when Ms. Thomas calls his name and tells him to work on his assignment. The students seem to like Ms. Thomas because she tries to make learning fun, and she lets them bring snacks to her class after lunch. However, she is worried that her job may be at risk if the class continues to be rambunctious.

## Application

Although personal observation would be ideal, Ms. Thomas has provided a wealth of information about her class. Her students are likely approximately 12 years old. From developmental psychology, these students likely enjoy talking to each other and visiting. Although it seems as if the majority of the students are able to do the assignments, Cedric apparently finds the work too hard or too boring. In any case, he does not complete his

assignments.

Given the three theories we have discussed previously, interventions might proceed in the following manner. Ms. Thomas might take some time to sit with her class, or have a colleague lead the discussion with Ms. Thomas out of the room. The interviewer might begin with questions such as: "How would you describe the behavior in your classroom?" "What do you think contributes to poor behavior?" In small groups, the students might be assigned to brainstorm solutions to the problems. Each group would share before asking the class members to generate some behavioral expectations for the class. This intervention would be described as more humanistic.

To include some behavioral interventions, Ms. Thomas might wish to consider reinforcing the entire class and individuals. Initially, Ms. Thomas proposes to reinforce the class as a whole by having them earn points each day, and be rewarded for good behavior and allowed to visit their peers during the last 15 minutes on Fridays only. This technique encourages self-regulation and self-efficacy when the class is successful. It teaches responsibility both individually and as a group. If the points are not reached, there are no snacks and no free time. At first the points could be awarded every 15 minutes; when the behavior was consistent, variable (random) awarding of points would replace the fixed-interval reinforcement.

Cedric's behavior could sabotage the snack and free time reinforcement. Thus, it would be important to shape Cedric's behavior with an individual behavior plan. There are several options; one would be to give Cedric a list of behaviors that need to be modified. He would need to choose only one to modify initially. The behavior would need to be defined down to the lost detail. The teacher and Cedric would need to observe the behavior and agree on a baseline. Finally, Cedric initially should be reinforced frequently when he has been able to regulate talking to others in class. As Cedric is successful, occasionally giving extra points to the entire class for the snack and free time due to Cedric's success will allow him to see himself as a productive member of the class; additionally, the class will view him with favor.

Only two interventions are necessary to incorporate all

three learning theories. They are interventions that incorporate many aspects of each theory and address group behavior and individual behavior. The teacher has modeled how to let people determine their group problems, brainstorm solutions, and determine specific interventions. She is reinforcing appropriate behavior both as a group and individually. The reinforcements are neither time-consuming nor expensive. They provide incentive for students to attend to learning and assignments as well as recognizing their preferences of snacks and visiting with friends.

### Conclusion

Teaching is a noble profession and can be highly rewarding. However, if the teacher becomes trapped into only one theory/orientation and does not realize the wide range of ideas available, higher levels will rarely be attained. Teaching may then become something less noble and less rewarding. One theory, model, or program by itself is frequently inadequate to address all the problems and dynamics within a classroom; however, integrating the theories allows many dimensions to be addressed at once. Thus, a teacher who is able to integrate the various models and select appropriate interventions is likely to be more successful, which will increase the teacher's self-efficacy. It becomes a win-win situation.

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